

AFTERWORD TO THE KREUTZER SONATA

At the suggestion of his secretary V. G. Chertkov, Tolstoy began this Afterword in October 1889, while he was still working on the story. This 'answer to the question, What does the author himself think about the subject of the story' (lxxxvi. 271; 1889) was completed in 1890 and first published in that year.

I have received, and continue to receive, a great deal of letters from people I don't know asking me to explain in clear and simple terms, what I think about the subject of the story I wrote entitled 'Kreutzer Sonata'. I will try to do this; that is in a few words, to express, as far as possible, the essence of what I wanted to say in this story, and of the conclusions which, in my opinion, can be made from it.

First of all, I wanted to say that in our society a firm conviction has been formed, general to all classes and supported by false science, that sexual intercourse is necessary for health, and that since marriage is not always a possibility, then sexual intercourse outside marriage, not obligating a man in any way besides a monetary payment, is a completely natural affair and therefore should be encouraged. This conviction has become so firm and generally accepted that parents, on the advice of their physicians, arrange debauchery for their own children; governments, whose single purpose consists in care for the moral well-being of their citizens, institutionalize debauchery, i.e. they regulate a whole class of women obligated to perish bodily and spiritually for the satisfaction of the passing demands of men, while bachelors with a completely clear conscience abandon themselves to debauchery.

And what I wanted to say here was that it is bad, because it cannot be that it is necessary for the sake of the health of some people to destroy the body and soul of other people, in the same way that it cannot be necessary for the sake of the health of some people to drink the blood of others.

The conclusion which, it seems to me, is natural to draw from this is that it is not necessary to yield to this error and

deception. But in order not to yield to this, it is necessary in the first place not to believe in immoral teachings no matter how they are supported by sham science, and in the second place, to understand that to enter a sexual relationship in which people either free themselves from its possible consequences, children, or dump the whole weight of the consequences on the woman, or prevent the possibility of the birth of children is a transgression of the simplest demand of morality. It is baseness, and that is why bachelors not wishing to live basely should not do this.

In order for them to be able to abstain, they should lead a natural way of life: not drink, not overeat, not eat meat, not avoid labour (not gymnastics, but exhausting, real work, not play), not permit thoughts about the possibility of intercourse with other men's wives, in the same way that a man does not permit himself such a possibility between himself and his mother, his sisters, his relatives, and the wives of his friends.

Any man can find hundreds of proofs that abstinence is possible and less dangerous and harmful for health than incontinence. This is the first conclusion.

The second is that in our society as a consequence of seeing amorous relations not only as a necessary condition of health and enjoyment, but also as a poetic and lofty blessing in life, marital infidelity has become a very ordinary phenomenon in all classes of society (in the peasant class especially, due to conscription).

And I think that this is not good. It can be concluded from this that men ought not to behave in this way.

In order for men not to behave this way, it is necessary that carnal love be seen differently, that men and women be educated in their families and through social opinion, so that both before and after marriage they would not regard falling in love and the carnal love connected with it as a poetic and elevated state as they look on it now, but rather as a state of bestiality degrading for a human being, so that the violation of the promise of fidelity given in marriage would be castigated by public opinion at least in the same way that violations of financial obligations and business fraud are castigated by public opinion,

rather than praised, as it is now in novels, verse, song, operas, and so forth. This is the second conclusion.

The third is that in our society, again as a consequence of the false significance given to carnal love, the birth of children has lost its significance and, instead of being the goal and justification for relations between spouses, has become an obstacle to the pleasant continuation of amorous relations. And this is why, both outside and within marriage, there has begun, on the advice of the votaries of marital science, the dissemination of the use of means which would deprive a woman of the possibility of childbirth. And something that previously did not exist and still does not among the patriarchal families of peasants has become customary and habitual: marital relations during pregnancy and nursing.

And I think that this is not good. It is not good to employ means to prevent the birth of children, in the first place because this frees people from the care and labour over children which serves as an expiation for carnal love, and secondly, because this is something quite close to an act most offensive to the human conscience—murder. And incontinence during the time of pregnancy and nursing is bad, because it undermines the physical, and, most importantly, the spiritual powers of a woman.

The conclusion which may be drawn from this is that people should not do this. But in order not to do this it is necessary to understand that abstinence, which constitutes a necessary condition of human dignity during the period of the unmarried state, is even more necessary in marriage itself. This is the third conclusion.

The fourth is that in our society in which children are considered to be either an obstacle to pleasure, an unfortunate accident, or an amusement (when limited to a certain predetermined number within a family), these children are educated without a sense of those tasks of human life which await them as rational and loving beings, but only in the light of the amusement which they may afford their parents. As a consequence of this, the children of people are educated like the children of animals, so that the chief care of parents consists

not in preparing them to be persons involved in a life of worthy activity (in this the parents are supported by false science, so-called medicine), but in how to feed them better, increase their growth, to make them clean, white, satisfied, and pretty (if this is not done in the lower classes, it is only because need prevents it, but their view of the matter is one and the same). And in pampered children, as in overfed animals, there is an unnaturally early appearance of an insuperable sensuality, which is the occasion of the terrible sufferings of these children in adolescence. Clothes, reading, plays, music, dancing, sweets, the whole environment of their lives, from the pictures on candy boxes to novels and tales and poems, inflame even more this sensuality; as a result, the most terrible sexual vices and diseases, which often persist into maturity, are the norm for children of both sexes.

I think that this is bad. The conclusion which might be made from this is that we need to stop educating the children of people as though they were the children of animals, and to set other goals for the education of human children besides an attractive, well-tended body. This is the fourth conclusion.

The fifth is that in our society, where the falling in love of a young man and a woman has as its basis, essentially, a carnal love that is elevated into the highest poetic goal of people's aspirations (all the art and poetry of our society serve as evidence of this), young people consecrate the better part of their lives, if men, in the searching and hunting for, and possessing of, the finest objects of love in the form of an amorous relationship or marriage, and, if women and girls, in the enticement and alluring of men into an affair or marriage.

And because of this, people's best energy is wasted not only on unproductive but on harmful work. A great deal of the senseless opulence of our life is a result of this. This is also the cause of men's idleness and the shamelessness of women, who do not disdain exhibiting, in fashions consciously borrowed from lewd women, those parts of the body which stimulate men's sensuality. And I think that this is bad.

It is bad because the achievement of the goal of union with the object of one's love, in marriage or outside marriage, no matter how it is made into an object of poetry, is a goal unwor-

thy of human beings in the same way that it is unworthy for human beings to set themselves as the highest good, as many people do, the goal of obtaining for themselves tasty and abundant food.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that we must stop thinking that carnal love is something especially elevated and must understand that the goal worthy of man, whether it is service to humanity, to country, to science, to art (to say nothing of service to God), no matter what it is, as long as we consider it to be worthy of man, cannot be achieved by means of union with the object of love in marriage or outside it. On the contrary, falling in love and union with the object of love (no matter how we try to prove the contrary in verse and prose) will never facilitate the achievement of a worthy goal for man, but will always impede it. This is the fifth conclusion.

This is the essence of what I wanted to say and what I thought I had said in my story. And it had seemed to me, although one may argue about how to correct the evil indicated in the positions mentioned above, that it is impossible not to agree with them.

It had seemed to me that it is impossible not to agree with these positions, in the first place, because they are in complete agreement with the progress of humanity, which always advances from dissipation towards greater and greater chastity, and with the moral consciousness of society, with our conscience, which always condemns dissipation and praises chastity; and secondly, because these positions are the only inescapable conclusions to be drawn from the teachings of the Gospel, which we profess, or at least, albeit unconsciously, recognize as the foundation of our morality. But this turned out not to be the case.

It is true that no one directly disputes that we should not indulge in debauchery before marriage, that we should not use artificial means to prevent conception, that we should not use our own children as a source of amusement, and that we should not consider an amorous union as the highest good—in a word, no one disputes that chastity is better than dissipation. But people say: 'If celibacy is better than marriage, then it is

obvious that people ought to do what is better. However, if people do this, the human race will come to an end, so the ideal of the human race cannot be its own destruction.'

But not to mention that the destruction of the human race is not a new concept for the people of our world, that for the religious it is a doctrine of faith, and for scientists it is the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from observations of the cooling of the sun, this objection veils a widely prevalent and long-standing misconception.

People say: 'If the human race attains the ideal of complete chastity, then it will annihilate itself; this is why the ideal cannot be true.' But those who say this, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are mixing two different things—the rule or injunction and the ideal.

Chastity is neither rule nor injunction, but an ideal, or rather—one of the conditions of this ideal. But the ideal is a true one only when its realization is possible only in an idea, in thought, when it is presented as attainable only in the infinite, and therefore, when the possibility of approaching it is infinite. If an ideal not only could be reached but we could imagine its realization, it would cease to be an ideal. Such was the ideal of Christ—the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, an ideal, foretold by the prophets, about how the time will come when all people will be taught by God, will turn their swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks, when the lion will lie down with the lamb, and all creatures will be united in love. The whole meaning of human life consists in movement towards this ideal. This is why the aspiration towards the Christian ideal in its entirety and towards chastity as one of the conditions of this ideal not only does not exclude the possibility of life, but, on the contrary, the absence of this Christian ideal would have annihilated the forward progress of humanity and therefore the possibility of life.

The opinion that the human race will come to an end if people with all their strength will aspire to chastity is similar to the assertion that has been made (indeed is still being made), that the human race will perish if people, rather than engaging in the struggle for existence, will with all their strength strive for a realization of love towards friends, towards enemies,

towards every living thing. These opinions also result from a misunderstanding of the difference between two methods of moral guidance.

Just as there are two ways of indicating to the traveller the path to be travelled, so there are also two methods of moral guidance for the person seeking the truth. One method is to point out objects that the person will meet along the way; thus he orients himself according to these objects. Another method is simply to give a person a direction on the compass which he carries with him, by which he continuously reads an invariable direction and can always make note of any degree of variation from it.

The first kind of moral guidance is provided through a set of external precepts, or rules: a person is provided with a set of defined norms of behaviour, what he should and should not do.

'Observe the Sabbath, circumcise, don't steal, don't drink alcohol, don't kill a living being, tithe, don't commit adultery, perform ritual ablutions, and pray five times a day, be baptized, receive communion, and so forth.' Such are the decrees contained in various external religious teachings: Brahmin, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, and church teachings falsely called Christian.

Another means of providing guidance is to indicate to a person that perfection is a state never to be reached, but an aspiration which one recognizes in oneself: the ideal is indicated to the person, and one can always measure oneself by the degree to which one has moved away from it.

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect.' Such is the teaching of Christ.

The verification of the fulfilment of external religious teachings is seen in the coincidence of behaviour with the injunctions of these teachings and in the possibility of this coincidence.

The verification of the fulfilment of the teachings of Christ is consciousness of the degree of incongruousness one's

behaviour has in relation to ideal perfection. (The degree of approximation is not perceptible; only the degree of variance from perfection is perceptible.)

The person who professes faith in external law is like a man standing in the light of a lamp suspended from a post. He stands in the light of this lamp, it shines on him, and there is nowhere further for him to go. The person professing the teachings of Christ is like someone carrying the light in front of him on a pole of unspecified length; the light is always in front of him and always spurs him to go beyond himself, newly revealing to him a new, illuminated space that attracts him.

The Pharisee thanks God that he fulfils everything required of him. The rich young man also fulfilled everything required of him from childhood and did not understand what he might lack. Such people cannot understand it any other way: in front of them there is nothing towards which they might continue to aspire. They have tithed, observed the Sabbath, honoured their parents, not committed adultery, nor theft, nor murder. What more is there? For the person professing Christian teaching, the achievement of every stage of perfection elicits a demand of entry to a higher stage, from which a still higher one is opened, and so on without end.

The person professing the law of Christ is always in the position of the publican. He always feels himself to be imperfect, he can't see the path behind him which he has passed: rather, he always sees in front of him the path along which he needs to go and which he has yet to travel.

This is what differentiates Christ's teaching from all other religious teachings. The distinction lies not in the difference of moral demands, but in the means by which people are guided. Christ did not make any kind of injunctions concerning how life should be lived; he never established any kind of institutions, not even marriage. But people who do not understand the special nature of the teaching of Christ, having become used to external teachings and desiring to feel themselves righteous, as the Pharisee felt himself righteous contrary to whole spirit of the teaching of Christ, have created an external teaching from the letter of the law, which is called the teaching

of the Christian Church, and they have substituted this teaching for the genuine teaching of the ideal of Christ.

The Church teachings which call themselves Christian, instead of the teachings of the ideals of Christ and contrary to the spirit of that teaching, set external standards and rules for all the manifestations of life. This is done in relation to the authority of the state, to the judicial system, to the military, to the Church, to the ritual of worship; it is done also in relation to marriage, although Christ not only never established marriage, but, if you search for external standards, rather denied it ('leave your wife and follow me'). Church teachings, calling themselves Christian, establish marriage as a Christian institution; that is, they set external conditions under which carnal love can be enjoyed without sin by the Christian, and can be completely lawful.

But since in genuine Christian teaching there is no foundation for the institution of marriage, it is as if people of our world have left one shore and not yet reached the other; that is, they essentially don't believe in the Church's definition of marriage, sensing that this institution is not founded in Christian teaching. Moreover, they are not shown the ideal of Christ, the aspiration towards complete chastity which is hidden by the teaching of the Church, and they remain without any kind of guidance with respect to marriage. As a result, a phenomenon occurs which at first seems strange, that among the Jews, the Muslims, the Lamaists, and other groups which recognize religious teachings of a considerably lower level than the Christian, but have exact external injunctions concerning marriage, the principle of the family and the fidelity of the spouses are incomparably more strictly adhered to than among so-called Christians.

These religions have a fixed type of concubinage, a polygamy limited according to known boundaries. Among us there exist complete dissipation and concubinage, polygamy and polyandry, not subject to any kind of rules, hidden under the appearance of a fictitious monogamy.

There cannot be and there never was Christian marriage, as there never was and never can be a Christian ritual of worship

(Matt. 6: 5-12; John 4: 21), nor are there any Christian teachers and fathers (Matt. 28: 8-10). There is no Christian property, no Christian army, judicial system, or state. This has always been understood by genuine Christians from the first century on.

The ideal of the Christian is love toward God and one's neighbour. This constitutes renunciation of self and service for God and one's neighbour. Carnal love and marriage are forms of service to oneself, and that is why in every case these are a hindrance to the service of God and to people; this is why, from the Christian point of view, carnal love and marriage are a degradation and a sin.

Getting married cannot promote the service of God, even in the case of marriage for the purpose of continuing the human race. It would be infinitely simpler if these people, rather than getting married to produce children's lives, would support and save those millions of children who are perishing around us from a lack of material (to say nothing of spiritual) sustenance. A Christian might enter into marriage without consciousness of degradation or sin, only if that person could see and know that the lives of all existing children were provided for.

It is possible not to accept the teaching of Christ, that teaching which has permeated all our life and on which our whole morality is based, but if a person does accept this teaching, it is impossible not to recognize that it points toward the ideal of complete chastity.

In the Gospel, of course, it is stated clearly and without any possibility of misinterpretation, that in the first place, a married man should not divorce his wife in order to take another, but should live with the one originally married (Matt. 5: 31-2; 19: 8); secondly, that consequently, a man in general, whether married, or unmarried, who looks at a woman as an object of pleasure, is sinning (Matt. 5: 28-9), and thirdly, that it is better for the man who is unmarried, to remain unmarried entirely, that is, to be completely chaste (Matt. 19: 10-12).

For a great many people these thoughts appear to be strange and even contradictory. And they actually are contradictory, but not within themselves; these thoughts contradict our whole way of life. Thus, a doubt involuntarily occurs: Who is right? These thoughts, or the lives of millions of people including my

own? This is the very feeling I experienced most intensely when I was in the process of coming to those convictions which I am expressing now: I never expected that the path of my thoughts would lead me to where they have led. I was horrified by my own conclusions, I did not want to believe them, but it was impossible not to believe them. And no matter how contradictory these conclusions are to the whole structure of our life, no matter how they contradict what I earlier thought and even expressed, I have been forced to recognize them.

‘But these are all general considerations which perhaps are correct. They relate to the teaching of Christ and are obligatory for those who profess it. But life is life, and it is impossible, having shown in advance the unreachable ideal of Christ, to abandon without any kind of guidance people who are facing one of the most urgent problems, one so universal and responsible for the most immense calamities.

‘At the beginning a passionate young man will be attracted to the ideal, but will be unable to sustain it, then will fall, and now recognizing no moral laws whatsoever, will fall into complete depravity.’ So runs the usual argument. ‘The ideal of Christ is unreachable, therefore it cannot serve us as a guide in life; it is possible to discuss it, to dream about it, but it cannot be applied to life, and this is why it is necessary to abandon it. We don’t need an ideal, but a rule, a guide set according to our strengths, according to the average level of moral capacity in our society: the honourable marriage according to church definition, or even a not entirely honourable marriage, in which one of the partners, as is the case with us, the man, has already had intimate relations with many women, or if only a marriage with a possibility of a divorce, or if only civil, or (extending the same logic) if only in the Japanese style, just for a specified time—why not extend the notion of marriage all the way to the brothels?’ People say that this is better than street debauchery. This is just where the trouble lies; in permitting oneself to lower the ideal to one’s own weakness, it becomes impossible to find the limit at which one must stop.

But of course this reasoning is false from the very start; it is false, first of all, to claim that the ideal of infinite perfection

cannot serve as a guide in life, and that taking this ideal as a guide, one must throw up one's hands, saying that 'I don't need it, since I also will never reach it, or lower the ideal to the level my weaknesses can tolerate.' To reason in this way is to be like the navigator who tells himself, 'Since I cannot reach a certain destination according to that line which my compass indicates, I will throw out the compass or stop looking at it; that is, I will reject the ideal or I will rivet the arrow of the compass to that place which will correspond in a given moment to the path of my vessel; that is, I will lower the ideal to my weakness.'

The ideal of perfection given by Christ is not a dream or a subject for rhetorical sermons, but is the most necessary and universally accessible guide for the moral life of people, like the compass is a necessary and easily understood tool for the guidance of navigators; it is only necessary to believe in one as it is in the other. No matter what the situation may be, the teaching given by Christ will always be sufficient for a person to receive the truest indication of what actions one should or should not perform. But one must believe this teaching completely, and in this teaching alone, and must stop believing in all the others, exactly in the same way that the navigator needs to believe in the compass, must stop looking at and being guided by what he sees on either side of his craft. One needs to know how to be guided by Christian teaching, as one needs to know how to be guided by a compass. In order to do this one must understand one's own position. One needs to learn how not to be afraid to define with exactitude how far one has moved away from the ideal of the direction given. No matter what level a person occupies, it is always possible for one to come closer to the ideal, and no position can be attained where one may say that the ideal has been reached and that a person cannot aspire to come even closer to it. Such is the aspiration of human beings towards a Christian ideal in general, and towards chastity in particular. If you can imagine the many various positions of people in regard to the sexual problem in which chastity is not observed, from an innocent childhood to marriage, in each stage between these two positions the teaching of Christ with the ideal it represents will always serve as a clear and definite

guide for what a person ought and what he ought not to do at each of these stages.

What should the pure young man or woman do? They should keep themselves free of temptations, and in order to be in the position of rendering all their strength to the service of God and people, they should strive towards an ever greater chastity of thought and desires.

What should the young man and woman do, having fallen to temptations, become engulfed by thoughts of aimless love or love for a certain person, and as a result having lost a certain portion of their capacity to serve God and people? They should do the same thing, they should not tolerate a further fall, knowing that such tolerance does not liberate them from temptation, but only strengthens it, and they should still continue to aspire towards an ever increased chastity for the possibility of fuller service of God and people.

What are people to do when the struggle overpowers them and they fall? They should look at their own fall not as a lawful pleasure, as it is now seen, when it is justified by the ceremony of marriage. Neither should they see it as a fleeting pleasure which it is possible to repeat with others, nor as a misfortune, when the fall is accomplished with unequals and without a ceremony, but should look at this first fall as having contracted an indissoluble marriage.

Marriage, with the consequence that attends it, the birth of children, defines, for those entering into it, a new, more limited form of service to God and people. Until marriage takes place, a person can spontaneously, and in the most varied forms, be of service to God and people; entering into marriage limits the sphere of one's activity, obligating one to rear and educate the progeny that result from the marriage, who are future servants of God and people.

What are a man and a woman to do who are living in marriage and fulfilling that limited service of God and people, through the raising and education of children? What follows from their situation?

The same thing. They should aspire together towards a liberation from temptation, to purify themselves, and to cease from sinning, to replace relations which impede the universal

and private service of God and people, to substitute for carnal love the pure relations of sister and brother.

This is why it is not true that we cannot be guided by the ideal of Christ because it is too lofty, too perfect and unreachable. We are not able to be guided by it only because we lie to ourselves and deceive ourselves.

Of course, if we say that it is necessary to have rules more practicable than the ideal of Christ, or that otherwise, having fallen short of the ideal of Christ, we will fall into depravity, we are not saying that the ideal of Christ is too high for us, but only that we do not believe in it and do not want to define our behaviour according to this ideal.

Saying that having fallen once we fall into depravity, we of course are only saying by this that we have already decided in advance that falling with one who is not an equal is not a sin, but is an amusement, an entertainment, for which it is unnecessary to make amends through that which we call marriage. If we had understood that the fall is a sin which should and can be redeemed only by the indissolubility of marriage and with the full activity which results from the bringing up of children born from that marriage, then the fall could in no way be the reason for sinking into debauchery.

Of course this is just as if a farmer did not consider the seeds he planted in one place which failed to grow as seeds at all, but having sown in a second and third place, considered only the seeds which produced a yield to be real seeds. Obviously, this is a man who had spoiled a great deal of land and seed without learning how to sow. Only when chastity is set as the ideal, and one recognizes that each fall, no matter with whom it took place, is a unique marriage that remains indissoluble for life, will it become clear that the guidance given by Christ is not only sufficient, but is the only one possible.

People say, 'Human beings are weak, it is necessary to give them a task in accordance with their strength.' This is like saying: 'My hands are weak, and I can't draw a straight line, that is, the shortest between two points. This is why I have to go easy on myself. So, rather than drawing a straight line as I would like to do, I will take as my model a crooked or broken

one.' The weaker my hand, the more necessary is a perfect model.

It is impossible, once one is acquainted with the Christian teaching of the ideal, to act as though we do not know it and to replace it with external precepts. The Christian teaching of the ideal has been revealed to humanity because it especially can guide us in the present age. Humanity has already outgrown the period of external religious injunctions, and no one believes in them any longer. The Christian teaching of the ideal is the only teaching that can guide humanity. It is impossible to replace the ideal of Christ with external rules; rather it is necessary firmly to hold this ideal before oneself in all its purity, and above all to believe in it.

It is possible to say to the person navigating not far from shore, 'Steer by that rise, that promontory, that tower', and so forth. But the time is here when the navigators have moved away from shore, and only the unattainable stars and the compass showing them the direction can and ought to serve as a guide. Both have been given to us.